

February 2014 Trustee Tip of the Month

Kentucky Public Library Standards: What are they and why use them?

The 2014-2015 *Kentucky Public Library Standards (5th Edition)* is now available. Submissions will be accepted November 1-30, 2014. There will also be another opportunity to submit the Standards survey in November of 2015. After that, the standards will be revised and the cycle will begin again.

A little history of KY PL Standards. In 2000, with the goal of ensuring that all of Kentucky's citizens have access to a foundational level of services, facilities, and materials, the Kentucky Public Library Association began the process of developing the KY Public Library Standards. Committees consisting of library directors and staff, trustees, State Advisory Council members and KDLA library consultants reviewed standards from 33 other states to determine which elements to include and analyzed the best practices in each category in creating the evaluation criteria for the defining the levels of service.

The Kentucky Public Library Standards continue to evolve to integrate the latest trends in technology and library services today. The Standards Committee regularly updates the Standards for use as a tool to evaluate the library's effectiveness and as a guide for focusing library resources in planning and developing goals for improvement that effectively address local needs, maximizing the library's visibility and role in the community.

Seven key areas have been chosen to guide librarians and trustees in determining the current strengths of the library: Governance and Administration; Human Resources; Collections; Services; Facilities; Technology; and, Marketing & Public Relations.

Three levels of achievement are possible and are based on an overall score from all sections of the Standards. The goal of each library is to reach the highest level possible based on the unique conditions such as population and income with which the library works. The Kentucky Public Library Association awards a certificate to every library as it attains the Essential, Enhanced, or Exemplary level of Standards.

What standards do for us. A standard can be defined as a rule or requirement determined by a consensus opinion of users that prescribes the accepted and the best criteria for materials, products, systems, services, or practices.

Some of the general benefits of a standard are safety, quality, and the interchangeability of parts or systems. In society, our mutually agreed-upon standard traffic signs and signals keep us safe on the roads and prevent the inevitable crashes that would result without them.

With standards in place, we can depend on our drinking water to be pure; medical care to be dependable; the assurance of a successful education for all children; foods can be chosen with confidence that they will be healthy and tasty; and buildings in which we live and work are stable and secure.

Standards allow for compatibility of technologies, as with the Secure Digital memory card, which can be used to store music or audible files, pictures, or data on various types of devices. Interchangeability makes it possible for many types of collaboration and provides established platforms for sharing and exchange.

Why use library standards? The Standards provide a self-evaluative tool that can be used along with a written strategic plan to guide library board trustees, the director, and the library staff in assessing the effectiveness of the current facilities, materials, programs, and services. This assessment provides a snapshot revealing what changes can be implemented to keep the library moving in the direction of the goals that were chosen in the strategic planning process. Lewis Carroll said, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." The Standards serve as a roadmap to help in planning for improvements in all seven of the components identified as key areas that will keep your library moving on the road towards excellence while fulfilling the unique needs of your community.

Techniques for Improvement. Scoring for the Standards to determine the level at which a library is currently operating is simply based on the total number of statements to which the answer is, "yes." To move the library up to a higher level entails being able to answer "yes" to MORE of the statements. So, look at each one and choose those that can easily be changed or added to what the library is already doing. The goal of using this tool is to help with assessment of the current status of the library's situation and to see what steps can be taken to provide growth and improvement that will provide the best possible library to the community you serve.

Look at the standards with the purpose of using them to see how much the library has grown and improved since the previous year. The board could look at one key area each month before submitting your Standards survey in November. If there is an area that cannot be addressed, such as the need for a larger building, don't become

discouraged by that. Plan to do whatever you can for the future on that item and then focus on those things that can be improved now.

Governance and Administration. Boards of trustees have been created by law to act as governing bodies for the library. Library board members are public officials who provide the leadership and vision necessary for effective and efficient operation of the library and for following sound practices of planning, administration, management, and funding. Directors and staff use established library administration and management practices to apply the policies and statutory obligations of the governing board to the daily operations of the library. Areas considered are: compliance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations; leadership to provide sustained funding; proper use of financial management practices and fiscal procedures; strategic planning; and, development of appropriate policies.

Human Resources. The success of virtually every program and service of the library depends upon having a skilled and motivated staff. In order to recruit and retain such a work force, the library must seek out the most qualified candidates, offer competitive salaries and benefits, support ongoing training and professional development opportunities, and provide a work environment that ensures equitable treatment for all employees.

Areas considered are: number of qualified employees; compliance with HR laws and regulations; attractive salary and benefits; and, training and professional development.

Collections. Kentucky's public libraries should provide a wide range of materials in all formats to meet customer needs. These standards recognize that building a diverse library collection is a difficult task and that libraries are often constrained in their purchasing. This section recommends minimum levels of holdings for the population served as one way to measure the effectiveness of a library's collection. Criteria include: commonly accepted practices used in selection, acquisition, and cataloging of material; and, the range and quantity of materials is adequate for the population served.

Services. Libraries are active providers of information services, reader's advisory services, educational support, youth and children's services, and programs. Well-qualified and trained library staff play an essential role in delivering these effective services and programs to all members of the community. Extension services and outreach programs make resources as widely available as possible, while technology enables remote access and expands the collection to include material held by other libraries. These standards recognize the importance of a library's service program including alternative access for those unable to use traditional library resources. Criteria considered include: service and programs to meet public needs; hours of service offered; compliance with ADA and other laws; use of emerging technologies; and, qualified and trained staff.

Facilities. Libraries should be conveniently located, aesthetically pleasing, have ample parking, and be free of physical barriers. The library interior should have a flexible design, which will allow for changes in the service needs of the community. The appearance of public libraries directly affects community use. Buildings should be large enough to adequately meet the needs of the service population. Criteria in this category include: adequate space for the population served; available parking spaces; community room; safety and accessibility factors; maintenance and upkeep; and, appropriate interior design for programs and services provided.

Technology. Information technology is an integral part of today's public library service. It is the responsibility of every public library to provide access to information in a timely manner and an appropriate format. The library meets this need by providing trained staff, up-to-date technology, and adequate communications that provide quick, reliable connections. Criteria here include: reliable and up-to-date hardware and software; replacement schedule for equipment; maintenance of all aspects of technology: hardware, software, equipment and network.

Marketing and Public Relations. The purpose of library marketing is to increase community awareness of the library's products and services. Library marketing involves the promotion of intangible services and tangible products. Effective marketing has two [2] major components: strategy and tactics. Strategy incorporates determining the target customer, choosing the right products and services for those customers, and distributing the products and services through proper channels. Tactics are the activities by which the strategy is accomplished. A successful public relations program sends a positive message through the appropriate medium to the right audience at the proper time and place. Criteria considered here include: budget allotted for marketing and PR; contact with the community, media, and government officials; library "branding;" maintenance of a marketing plan; library participation in local events; range of techniques used to promote and publicize library services.

If you need help with any part of the Standards, please contact your regional librarian. The current Standards documents are available online at: <http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/plssd/Pages/LibraryStandards.aspx>.